PELECANUS CRISPUS IN ALBANIA.

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PELICANS AS OBSERVED IN EASTERN EUROPE.

By R. B. Lodge.

(Plate V.)

A photographic and collecting expedition to Eastern Europe in search of Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus* and *P. onocrotalus*) and Great White Herons (*Ardea alba*), in the spring of 1906, proved to be not the least interesting of the expeditions I have made after the rarer birds of Europe. It was successful so far as *P. crispus* and *A. alba*, but *P. onocrotalus* has evaded my search. It was memorable also for several other species met with for the first time, and last but not least, for the great kindness I experienced everywhere, not only from the ornithologists of Budapesth, Sarajevo, and Bucarest, but from many others in various parts of Montenegro, Albania, Hungary, and Roumania.

After short stays at Budapesth and Sarajevo, the train was taken to Gravosa, on the Adriatic. From there the only means of travel is by the comfortable steamers of the Austrian Lloyd or the Hungaro-Croatia lines.

My first destination was to a small town on the Adriatic coast, where, from information received, I expected to find *P. crispus*. On first arrival at this very picturesque and interesting little port, I was unable to speak or understand a single word; but after some somewhat weird experiences, and after I had engaged a room at the only inn, I was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of a Montenegrin law student, who spoke French, besides nearly all the other European languages, English and Spanish being the only ones he did not understand. His assistance was simply invaluable, and by its means I was able to engage men and horses, and to explore the neighbourhood. A small lake was the first place visited, but, though I had been told they nested there a few years ago, I failed to see a single bird. Purple Herons were just beginning to build, being seen carrying sticks and building materials, and Marsh-Harriers were, as usual, very abundant. One Pigmy Cormorant was noticed, and great quantities of Coots and Ducks.

A Marsh-Harrier being seen sitting on what looked at a distance as if it might be a nest, I waded into the reeds to investigate. There was no nest as it happened, but while searching a something on the surface of the water attracted my attention. It looked like a bird, but, being quite motionless, I thought it was dead, and waded up to see. On getting near it proved to be a Little Bittern (*Ardetta minuta*), and alive. The bird was crouching on the surface of the water in a most curious and unbird-like attitude, and allowed me to come so close that I was impressed with the idea to try and catch it alive. Walking slowly through water up to my waist, I succeeded in grasping it round the neck, and astonished my boatmen by taking it back alive. Then it sat on my knee for more than an hour, making no attempt to escape, but towards evening it became more lively. It was probably trying to escape the notice of the Marsh-Harrier in the first place, and then my arrival on the scene caused it to remain as it was for the same reason.

A few days later another locality further south was visited, and here, for the first time, I saw *Pelecanus crispus* in a wild state. On nearing the mouth of a small river three huge birds flying past proved to be Pelicans, and afterwards we saw more of them fishing and resting on the sand. It was not possible to approach nearer than five hundred yards, and, though I tried one photograph at this range, the distance was too great for it to be of any practical use. We found no nests, nor could we see any sign of any nesting colony. It was, however, impossible to ascertain whether they were breeding, further search being forbidden by three men armed with loaded rifles.

After this stoppage I was particularly glad to receive a pressing invitation from the consul of a place further down the coast to pay him a visit. I heard that Pelicans could be seen from the windows of his house. Such an opportunity was too good a one to lose, and I packed up and departed by the first steamer I could get. I found a hearty welcome on arrival, and, in fact, experienced the advantage of my host's influence and position before I reached his house, for I had to send for him in a hurry to come and rescue me and my belongings from the officials of Turkish custom-house. They had opened all my luggage, and every individual article was strewed about on the floor; my gun and cartridges were seized, and, finally, they wanted to open all my boxes of plates. This was too much to stand, and I managed by energetic protest to stay proceedings until he arrived, and carried us off in triumph to his house. The gun and cartridges, however, had to remain where they were until the governor was persuaded to return them a day or two afterwards. The ordeal of passing a Turkish custom-house is something to be dreaded. Elsewhere some insulated wire for my electric camera was confiscated. I took this away again from the official, but when the battery was found, that was pounced upon, and I had to give up the rescued wires, which were, of course, of no use without the battery. In vain I asserted I had the governor's permission, and that he had received instructions to assist me, and that I should demand from him their return. I got them back the next day, after complaining to the governor and consul. The fact is, they seize anything they do not understand, and, as most things are beyond the Turkish comprehension, the result is annoying for the unfortunate traveller. Books, for instance, are forbidden articles, and will probably be confiscated, and sent to Constantinople for examination.

I found that my host spoke excellent English, besides speaking fluently seven or eight other languages, and was a thorough good and keen sportsman, and also a naturalist; while his official position and knowledge of the people enabled him to show me more of the country than would have been possible for anyone less influential.

It turned out to be quite true that Pelicans could be seen from the windows of the consulate. There were constantly about a dozen fishing or resting on the low islands in the lagoon; but I soon began to doubt whether any were nesting there, for the great majority of the birds were immature. A fortnight's hard work, wading to all the islands, and searching the reed-beds, failed to produce any signs of a nesting colony. The fishermen, too, confirmed this idea, for they told us that no nests had been seen there for very many years.

In the meantime every effort was made to photograph a Pelican by lying in wait for them near their favourite places, and by trying to drive them within range of the camera. The automatic electric-photo trap was also tried, sometimes being left out all night, in the hope of an early morning success, when the birds might be less suspicious of danger. But all these efforts were of no avail; while it was impossible to approach them by stalking with the camera at nearer than five hundred yards, at which distance even such huge birds as Pelicans are not worth photographing even with the telephoto lens.

At this point the map of the surrounding country was consulted, as we felt confident that there must exist some nesting place at no very great distance. Eventually we determined to ride for three or four days, and search two or three likely places, taking with us in pack-saddles just bare necessaries, so that we could travel lightly, and cover as much ground as possible. The first night was spent at the house of an Albanian bey, who entertained us hospitably with a lamb roasted whole, and the many courses of a regular Turkish dinner. The next morning we started early, with two of his followers armed with Martinis as guards and guides. As guides, however, they were not an unqualified success, for towards the afternoon they appeared to have lost their way, and we found ourselves on the wrong side of a big lake. Here we took direction ourselves after a look at the map, and struck out a line across very swampy and treacherous country. Eventually we found ourselves in the right direction, after nearly getting bogged in the swamps, and experiencing some difficulty in crossing a narrow but deep river, and several broad ditches. On the way we put up two Sea-Eagles (*Haliaëtus albicilla*), and two Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron* *percnopterus*) from a dead and putrid cow. A very large flock of Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) was also seen, and on the reedy shores of the lake many Squacco Herons (*Ardea ralloides*), and Little Egrets (*Herodias garzetta*). The whole lake, which was of large extent, appeared to be grown over with dense reeds, except in one or two open places, which could be seen in the distance from the hills. But we could see no signs of nesting Pelicans, and the natives assured us that none nested there.

We turned our backs then on this lake, after a rest and something to eat under the shade of a big fig-tree, and rode for some hours over the hills through a thick scrubby forest, following a narrow track which wound in and out of the trees, until we arrived in the evening at a small village. At the house of the chief inhabitant, a well-to-do peasant, we found an hospitable welcome. My friend, myself, and our host were waited upon, as we sat at dinner on the floor around a low table about four inches high, by six gigantic Albanians, each with a double row of shining cartridges round his waist; their rifles hung ready for instant use on the walls, which were loopholed for musketry fire. It turned out that the master of the house had a blood feud or "vendetta" hanging over him, and had to maintain a bodyguard of ten men as a protection. Nevertheless, in the morning he rode out on his mare to accompany us a part of our way, and to engage for us two fishermen as guides to a neighbouring lagoon, where he thought the Pelicans might possibly be found. These two fishermen were wild-looking fellows, with faces like Eagles, and were clad in loose brown garments. They assured us that the Pelicans were nesting, and that they could take us to the place. As on cross-examination they really seemed to know what they were talking about, and knew, for example, the right colour of a Pelican's egg, and how many were laid, our hopes began to revive. One of them could speak Italian, like most of the fishermen and sailors on this coast, and seemed more intelligent than one might expect from his appearance. We lost no time, and were soon afloat in two rude dug-out canoes, which the men managed skilfully with single paddles. In the far distance we soon saw a mass of white objects. These, they told us, were Pelicans on their nests, and we scrutinized them eagerly through our glasses as we advanced. At first sitting, as we were low down, level, or a little below the surface of the water, they appeared to be on the further shore of the lagoon in front of a fringe of tamarisk-bushes, which we hoped would serve us as a screen to enable us to approach them unobserved. As we drew near, however, we saw that, instead of being, as we had supposed, on the mainland, the nests were placed on two low sandy islets devoid of any vegetation more than a foot high. The men had told us that they could bring us to within thirty yards of the birds without unduly alarming them, and this was found to be correct. Getting out of my canoe into the shallow water with the camera, I made a few exposures, but my stock of plates was very limited, as one box had had its contents completely smashed and pulverized by some accidental knock in the pack-saddles during our cross-country journey. We therefore hurried back, determined to bring a tent and supplies for a few days, with a full stock of photographic necessaries. The consulate was reached the following day, and we began our preparations at once, so that early the next morning we were able to dispatch two pack-horses early, thus giving them a good start, while we ourselves followed a couple of hours later. By riding hard all day over the hills, only stopping to give our horses and ourselves a rest and a feed at midday, we reached the forest on the shores of the lagoon in time to pitch the tent before dark.

Though we were quite a strong party, including, besides ourselves, four men armed with Martinis and magazine rifles, it was considered by the natives a very rash thing to sleep in this forest. There was, as a matter of fact, some chance of an attack, as it was a notorious resort for robbers; but the night, or two nights, passed quite quietly and peaceably. We were certainly much more comfortable in our well-appointed tent than we should have been in the village; and we slept much better—my friend in a camp-bed, and myself in a sleeping-bag on a bed of leaves, covered with a mackintosh-sheet—than on doubtful sheepskin rugs. After dark the effect was very fine, as the light of the camp-fire flickered on the picturesque costumes and equipment of our attendants, bringing their forms into strong relief against the gloomy and mysterious background of the forest.

Early in the morning we were afloat again, and I was soon landed at the back of the island, and left alone with the Pelicans. There was no particular difficulty in approaching them slowly and gradually, taking care not to cause them undue alarm at first. I advanced nearer and nearer, taking photographs at each step, until, after some time, they allowed me to come within twelve or fifteen yards. If sometimes they left their nests it was only for a short distance, and they soon returned as they became more confident that I was not dangerous. And a great satisfaction it was to be at last at such close quarters with these birds, which had evaded my pursuit for a good month, and to be able to watch the habits of such a wary and comparatively little-known species.

The nests were generally in groups of six or eight together, some of them quite small and flat on the ground—mere flat trodden rings of sticks; but in each group there were generally one or two considerably higher than the rest. These were well and completely made of sticks, and about two feet high—very similar to a Cormorant's nest. Two eggs seemed to be the full clutch; these were long and white, rough and chalky, but by this date (May 4th) the young had nearly all hatched. However, I obtained nine clutches altogether, and might have taken some more. Some of the young were still in the nests; a few only a day or two old, others as large as a goose, and many more, nearly as large as their parents, were sitting on the sand, or swimming in the shallow water of the lagoon. The younger ones progressed by crawling, helping themselves along with their wings. Those in down presented a curious appearance. Their colour was a dull dirty white, with leaden-coloured beaks and feet, and small pouches of the same colour. From the young ones proceeded a constant moaning sound, like the lowing of cows or Buffaloes.

The stomach of a young bird in down which I skinned was enormously distended, and contained a large double-handful of what appeared to be vegetable matter. It was difficult to imagine that it proceeded from a fish diet, but rather resembled the contents of the stomach of a goose after grazing in a field.

I had several opportunities of watching the young Pelicans being fed by their parents. Naumann says that *P. onocrotalus* feeds its young from the pouch. In the case of *P. crispus*, at any rate, the young bird inserts its whole head down the parent's throat, much lower than the opening of the pouch. In fact, the point of the young bird's beak could be most distinctly seen pressing from inside at the base of the old bird's neck. In this observation I was corroborated by my friend the consul, who from an adjacent islet was watching the birds through his glass, while lying prone on the sand. His description of what he saw exactly corresponded with what I have described.

The old birds frequently yawned, stretching their necks and beaks upright, at the same time arching their lower mandibles, which are exceedingly flexible, into the shape of a hoop. It *may* be, perhaps, that this is an attempt to dislodge the numbers of parasites, apparently intestinal worms, which were adhering in large numbers to the inner skin of the pouch of an adult female which was shot and skinned.

The peculiar character of the skin was very noticeable. It was porous and cellular to an extraordinary degree, resembling a series of innumerable air-bubbles. Even the body had large air-cavities, and the bones were very hollow. This porosity, no doubt, helps to support their huge bodies in the air, and must serve a most useful purpose during flight. They can fly well and strongly, with the head drawn back and the beak resting on the doubled-back neck.

This colony had its parasites. Hooded Crows (*Corvus cornix*) and Gulls (*Larus cachinnans*) walked about in a most impudent and familiar manner among the Pelicans. They no doubt act as scavengers, and devour any fish dropped, and probably they also eat the eggs and any dead young birds. The fishermen described how the Eagles spent whole days devouring young Pelicans, and we found a nearly full-grown young one almost entirely eaten, while near by lay the feather of an Imperial Eagle.

The fishermen, by the way, appeared to regard the Pelicans in a very friendly way, and did not look upon them, as I had been told, as rivals in business. On the contrary, they seemed to have a sort of superstitious liking for them, and were very unwilling for any of them to be shot. They denied altogether their feeding on fish, and were quite surprised when a mass of eels which they had disgorged was pointed out to them. On the other hand, they gladly went in pursuit of a wounded *Larus* *cachinnans*, which had been winged, and described these birds as being very mischievous, and doing much damage to the fishing.

The soil of the islands was entirely composed of shells—broken-up cockle-shells. The only vegetation was a species of samphire, growing like heather, but this only flourished where there were no nests. In this samphire were countless hosts of mosquitoes and poisonous-looking horse-flies, and I fully expected to be fearfully tormented. However, much to my relief, I was not stung once during my five hours' stay on the islet. I met the same flies later in the Dobrudscha, when I was not so lucky. They can fetch blood every time!

This expedition of ours, being quite unauthorized, caused great excitement in the minds of the Turkish authorities. It was reported that an Englishman was travelling about the country, and inquiries and official reports were flashing along the telegraph-wires between Scutari and Constantinople. As they could not get hold of me they put into prison the poor Albanian, whose only offence was that he had given us food and shelter for a night. He was accused of "conspiring with foreigners," and some difficulty was experienced in effecting his release. As it happened, I had official permission from Constantinople, but had not known I was within the jurisdiction of the Governor-General of Scutari, to whom I had been recommended. I called on him later, and found him very courteous and obliging. It will not, however, be very easy in future for anybody to penetrate as far as the locality we visited, for the natives will not unnaturally oppose any visit for fear of getting into trouble again. This is no doubt exactly the effect desired by the Turks, and, after all, perhaps it may serve a good purpose, for the Pelicans seem to be receding further and further from civilization. I can only hope that this particular colony may remain undisturbed for many years.

IDENTIFICATION OF WILD DUCKS' DOWNS.

By J. A. Harvie-Brown, F.R.S.E., F.Z.S.

I wish to refer back to old papers on this subject which appeared in 'The Zoologist' and 'Ibis,' and as they seem to have been forgotten, or are unknown to many of our younger ornithologists, to ask if their reproduction in 1906 might not be advisable?

For convenience, I place the two papers referred to in parallel columns, with cross-references.

Let me also recommend that all examinations and comparisons of "downs" be conducted as follows:—

The downs should be cleared of all extraneous matter, such as *moss*, *blades of grasses*, *leaves*, &c., which may have got mixed with the downs.

Any flank-feathers found in the nest should be carefully preserved and placed in a small envelope, and bear careful authentication, same as the eggs and down of each "clutch."

(*a*). The downs only of *first* nests should be collected, or, if of *first* and *second* layings of the same species, must be kept in separate boxes, &c.

(*b*). Downs in bulk, after cleaning, should be placed with the eggs of same "clutch" in square glass-topped boxes, and the downs should be so disposed as to rise up close to the glass tops, and present a uniform and smooth appearance.

(*c*). The measurements of the eggs, carefully taken by oömeter* in millimetres, should be entered on a card or slip, and enclosed, with full authentication, in the above-mentioned small square envelopes, along with the flank-feathers (if any). The feathers may be fixed in some convenient manner also to the card or slip.

(*d*). Separate sprays of down may in like manner be affixed,

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* The oömeter I have always used is one made by J. Buck, Newgate Street, and Waterloo Road, Lambeth.

neatly, to cards or slips, or *folded pieces* of *paper*, for comparing under Sommerfeldt's system, and the microscope.

(*e*). But first and foremost, and most important of all, each "clutch" or nest of eggs, and accompanying down and feathers, *must be* carefully collected and thoroughly identified; and it *is impossible to expend too great trouble in this authentication, as a first and necessary step, if the collection is to be of any value or usefulness afterwards.*

(*f*). Then—and supposing a collection of thoroughly identified *clutches* (I don't admire the word "clutch": it reminds me of rather wholesale *lifting*; but I use it as at least descriptive) have been procured and carefully treated—*then* these should be examined and compared always in a *northern light*, and in absence of *direct* sun-rays—an artist's light, in fact—*if in bulk*. Single sprays may (ought to) be examined in *both* lights, and results carefully noted in note-book or on cards enclosed in the boxes.

(*g*). An ordinary Salvin cabinet drawer of requisite depth will hold *eight* of these boxes, and the drawer may have a lid, or *be only a tray with a rim*, slightly higher than the boxes.

(*h*). If an *extensive* collection for more thorough comparisons be made, each drawer may be used to hold, say, as many as eight "clutches" of the *same* species from *different* localities; or, if this be considered too *wholesale a method*, one or two eggs with the downs may suffice. Or, if the items be reduced to, say, *four* of each species, or *two* of each species, still there will be good material for comparisons, either *inter se*, or subsequently *with others which require authentication.*

Needless to say, the collector's note-books ought to contain the very fullest and most careful accounts of each "setting of eggs," and it would be well if photography can be called in to identify *the birds upon the nests.*

I now proceed to revise the articles.

DUCKS' DOWN.

1st.—Dresser, H. E. (Zool. 1867, June, p. 776), quotes Sommerfeldt in his "List of the Birds noticed in East Finmark," Zool. S. S. 700, and ditto, 761, &c.).

Sommerfeldt described the downs *of the following ducks* taken from nests by Lapps, from SINGLE SPRAYS.

2nd.—Seebohm and myself made careful examinations and comparisons of ten species of Ducks' downs, collected by ourselves in Russia; but we described ours from the down IN BULK. These ten species are here given in the *second* column, and we endeavoured to classify these ten downs in our paper in the 'Ibis' for 1876, p. 62—classed *A. B. C. D.*—*i. e.*:—

A. White downs. *B.* White-tipped downs. *C.* Large dark downs, *without* white tips. *D.* Small dark downs, *without* white tips.

Besides the above ten species, I have also taken (collected myself) eggs and downs of the following species:—Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander, Mallard, Pochard, Tufted Duck.

And of the ten species we obtained in Russia, I have also collected eggs and down of Wigeon, Scoter, Teal, and Shoveler elsewhere.

Of other Ducks, I possessed eggs and downs of several other European species, including *Marbled Duck*, *Iceland Golden-eye*; and down of *Greylag-* and *Bean-Geese* (the latter taken in Russia, the Greylags taken in Britain by myself).

But all the above were lost by fire in 1897.

Since then I have formed another series, numbering some fifteen species, including species taken by, or collected by, the late John Young, who left me his collection, and others obtained through Mr. Marsden, of Bristol, by purchase; but I do not use these *latter at all* in the table above given, as this latter series *may* be correctly identified and authenticated, or *may not*; and I have no means available for getting to *bed-rock truth* about them, though I must say I *believe* them to be correct —though without possessing the *absolute proof* which appears *still to be necessary* to have Ducks' nests identified to the complete satisfaction of naturalists generally, viz. *shooting the birds off the nests*, or *photographing them on the nests*, or *watching them go off or on to the nests, by experienced ornithologists and able collectors* (?). But it does seem to me that something more might be done than has yet been done, on these now somewhat old-fashioned lines, by young ornithologists who have good opportunities and *sufficient patience and sound judgment of circumstances*—scientific practice or scientific logical training, in fact.

SOMMERFELDT'S DESCRIPTIONS FROM SINGLE SPRAYS.	SEEBOHM AND HARVIE-BROWN'S DESCRIPTIONS FROM BULK.
A. CLANGULA.—The very thin light down is *white*; the centrum *pure white*; rami *rather long*, white, with a slight grey tinge towards the points. The radii are *not long*, and lay rather *close*. (See A. of class, opposite column.)	A. WHITE DOWN: (1) Smew, down *large, greyish white*; (2) Golden-eye, down scarcely to be distinguished from Smew's, but has a slight *bluish tinge*. (See opposite under *A. clangula*.)
A. GLACIALIS.—The rather *thick* and *close* down is *blackish grey, like soot*, with a *light centrum*, and consists of larger and smaller down. The smaller down has the centrum light grey, and the rami light blackish grey right *out to the point*. The larger down has the centrum light blackish grey; the rami dark blackish grey *out to the point*; the radii long, *standing out* almost at right angles. (See D. of class, opposite column.)	B. WHITE-TIPPED: (1) Pintail; (2) Wigeon. (1) *Pintail*.—Down smaller than (2); brown, with pale centres, indistinctly tipped with white. (Sommerfeldt calls this "rather large, thick, and close." Our comparison is smaller than (2) of same class.) (2) *Wigeon*.—Down larger than (1), of same class of white-tipped downs; darker brown than (1), pale centres, *long* and *conspicuous white tips*.
A. ACUTA.—The rather *large*, thick, and close down is *light greyish brown*, with *white centrum*, making the *white point* of the rami appear *indistinct*; the centrum is *quite pale* brownish white; the rami *grey towards the light centrum*, shaded outwards with light greyish brown, the outer point being *white*; the radii rather long, and *standing out*. (See B. of class, opposite column.)	C. LARGE DARK, WITHOUT WHITE TIPS. (1) *Black Scoter*. — Down medium size, *darker brown than* Pintail's, *lighter than* Wigeon's; centres *pale* but *conspicuous*. (2) *Velvet Scoter*.—Down larger than Black Scoter's; darker than Pintail's or Wigeon's; centres *less* conspicuous *than* Black Scoter's. (3) *Scaup*.—Down about the *same size* as Velvet Scoter's, but *darker*; centres *inconspicuous*.
A. PENELOPE. — The large and *not close* down is *dark greyish brown*, with *light centrum*, but the white points are *clearly visible*; the centrum is *greyish white*; rami *rather long, dark greyish brown*, with a *white point* of rather more than one line in length; the radii *long*, and *sticking out*, and not lying close. The down has therefore some resemblance to that of *A. acuta*, but is *darker*, and the *long white points clearly seen*. (See B. of class, opposite column.)	D. SMALL DARK, WITHOUT WHITE TIPS. (1) *Long-tailed Duck*.—Down small, darkish brown; with pale centres. (2) *Shoveler*. — Down small, darker than Long-tailed Duck's; pale centres. (3) *Teal*.—Down small, darker brown than either Long-tailed Duck's or Shoveler's; pale centres.

SOMMERFELDT'S SYSTEM. SEPARATE SPRAYS.	SEEBOHM AND HARVIE-BROWN'S TABLES. IN BULK.
A. CRECCA.—The *short* but *close* down looks *greyish brown*, with *whiter spots on the ground of the white* centrum, and small white down; the lesser down has the centrum *white*; rami *greyish brown*; the white radii at the centrum rather *close*, whereas the brown radii are over one line long, and placed rather *apart from one another*. (See D. of class, opposite column.)	
A. NIGRA.—The fine but thin down (*taken off a bird* in June) is very light, with a reddish grey tinge; the centrum is white; the rami rather long, white, with a reddish grey tinge, and light grey point; the radii are very short, and stand out at almost right angles. (See C. of class in opposite column.)	It might be a help to working naturalists if collectors who possess THOROUGHLY AUTHENTIC collections of Duck's eggs and downs would assist. There are—LET IT BE REMEMBERED—many circumstances which militate against dealers' eggs being admitted in scientific comparisons.
A. FUSCA.—The down (*taken off a bird* in June) is dark, with light grey spots; the centrum light brownish grey; rami rather long, dark greyish brown, with light grey points. (See C. of class in opposite column.)	
MERGUS SERRATOR.—The short but rather thick and close hanging down is light blue-grey; the centrum light grey, almost white; the short rami light blue-grey, with quite short light grey points; the radii light blue, with grey points, giving the whole down the appearance of being strewn with meal-dust.	

N.B. this—The above were examined IN BULK in a *clear but not too bright light,* and *in the absence of direct rays of sunshine.*

It should also be borne in remembrance what heads the columns, *viz.* examined IN BULK and not IN SPRAYS only; so *we did not* go into the comparative descriptions of the *rami* and *radii* as Sommerfeldt did. I think that may require a more microscopical examination.

NEWFOUNDLAND SEALING, 1906.

By Thomas Southwell, F.Z.S.

Notwithstanding the unfavourable result of the sealing voyage of 1905, this precarious industry has been pursued with increased vigour in the past season, three additional steamers having been added to the fleet, bringing the number up to twenty-five. One of these is the 'Adventure,' of 829 tons, the largest and most powerful vessel ever engaged in this business; the others are the 'Havana,' of 190 tons, and the 'Terra Nova,' of 450 tons. Only six of these sailed from St. Johns, four from Channel (Port-aux-Basques) for the Gulf sealing, the rest from the more northerly ports of Pool's Island and Wesleyville. The eastern sealing has been very successful, and the catch much more evenly distributed than last year, no fewer than eleven vessels having more than 15,000, five others having between 10,000 and 15,000, and of the remaining nine 6786 was the lowest. The average of the twenty-five vessels was 13,673, and the total number of Seals captured 341,836, valued at £121,509. To these must be added some 45,000 taken by the Magdalene Islands. At the eastern sealing, the 'Adventure' headed the list with 30,193 pelts, the 'Neptune' coming in second with 24,020. The Gulf steamers did badly, owing to stress of weather and the unfavourable condition of the ice.

The main patch of the breeding Seals was struck some ninety or hundred miles N.N.E. of the Funks, twenty-one of the vessels speedily being amongst them, and 280,000 are said to have been slaughtered between the 16th and 20th of March—24,000 of these in one day. The close proximity of the vessels, it is alleged, led to several instances of the misappropriation of each other's "pans," and caused much ill-feeling. The 'Adventure' was the first to get into the patch (on the 11th), closely followed by the 'Neptune,' where for a time they had it all to themselves (the others having gone too far north), hence their superior success; and the former vessel then proceeded in a north-easterly direction in search of what is known as "Capt. Charlie's patch of Hammer Heads" (see last year's Notes, p. 362), but without success, and thus missed the Hoods, of which she captured only seventy-three young and fifty-four old ones. The 'Bloodhound' was the first steamer to return, reaching Harbour Grace on March 27th.

Mr. Chafe's circular gives the following analysis of the results of the voyage:—The number of Harps was 301,436 young, 3122 old, and 8534 Bedlamers (*i. e.* over-year Seals); 17,810 young and 10,937 old Hoods. The young Harps were in excellent condition, but the Hoods very poor.

The spring was very rough and cold, and much sickness prevailed amongst the men in the shape of colds, frost-bites, and pneumonia, resulting in no less than four deaths.

I cannot close these notes without expressing my sincere regret for the rather sudden death, at the age of seventy years, of my valued correspondent, Sir Robert Thorburn, K.C.M.G., which took place on the 13th March last. Since the year 1852, when he left his Scotch home to take up his residence in St. John's, Sir Robert took an active part in the legislature of the Colony, and for several years held the office of Premier. His death has removed one of the most highly respected and influential inhabitants of the Colony, and I have been greatly indebted to his courtesy for information relating to the fisheries of Newfoundland, of which Board he was a member.

My thanks are due to Mr. Furneaux, editor of the St. Johns 'Evening Herald,' for his kind assistance.

NOTES ON THE KITE (*MILVUS ICTINUS*) IN SOMERSET.

By F. L. Blathwayt.

In olden days five royal forests existed in Somerset, namely, Exmoor, Neroche, North Petherton, Selwood, and Mendip, and it is only reasonable to suppose that a forest-haunting bird like the Kite must at one time have been very numerous in the county. A glorious land it must have been in those old days for the lovers of rural sport. Fine stretches of breezy moorland, hundreds of acres of waving woods, lonely expanses of stagnant mere and swampy marsh harboured in plenty the various birds and beasts of the chase. What merry hunting-parties from Saxon to Tudor days these forests must have witnessed! Here, indeed, King Alfred may have taught his haggard to stoop to the lure, and here King John, ever keen for the chase and a frequent visitor to Somerset, doubtless flew his well-trained Falcons at Wild Duck, Heron, and Crane. Much of the wild glory of these royal game-preserves has now departed, though some of them still preserve many traces of their ancient features. In one of them the wild Red-deer is still a beast of the chase, and the clang of horn and deep notes of hound are heard there as in days of yore. But the Kite is now a bird of the past. In the times of the Stuart Kings it may here have formed a quarry for the trained Gyr-falcons of the wealthy, but the birds were probably left much to themselves until the improvement in firearms enabled man to wage an all too-successful war against these ravagers of the poultry-yard. It is probable that a stricter form of game-preserving, coupled with handier guns, tended to diminish the numbers of this species, while the bird's own fondness of making raids on goslings and poultry no doubt hastened its extinction. If we remember this habit, it is far more likely that the money paid for the destruction of "Kites," as recorded in many old parish accounts, was really paid for the fork-tailed bird, and not, as some suppose, for the Buzzard, a species which shuns the haunts of man, and feeds chiefly upon Moles and other small mammals. Hence it is that the mewing cry of the Buzzard may still often be heard in our county, but the Kite has gone for ever.

The task of trying to trace the former abundance of the Kite in Somerset is a somewhat melancholy one. We have interesting evidence that the species inhabited these regions some nineteen hundred years ago, as its bones have been identified among those of other birds unearthed from the lake-dwelling near Glastonbury, which was discovered in 1892. To come to more recent times, it is probable that this species haunted the fringes of the meres on the central level of Somerset until they were drained about a century ago. Their nests would be placed among the tall trees of the neighbouring forests, while the goslings and poultry of the farmers, or the young of the numerous waterfowl, would supply them with many a meal.

It is impossible to fix exactly the date when the Kite became a rare bird in Somerset, though it is probable that the process of extinction when once begun was rapid. As the trees disappeared from some of the ancient forests, such as Mendip, the birds would have to shift their quarters; but it appears that at the close of the seventeenth century the species was quite numerous in West Somerset, on the skirts of Exmoor.

From the churchwardens' accounts for the parish of Luccombe, we learn that payment was made for the destruction of five Kites in 1692, and again for sixteen Kites in 1701, at the rate of twopence apiece. When we read in the same accounts that threepence apiece was paid for Hedgehogs, it is evident that the Kite could have been by no means a rare bird in those days. Again, in the churchwardens' accounts for Porlock, it is stated that in the year 1738 nine Kites were paid for at the rate of twopence apiece, while in 1754, 10s. 4d. was paid for sixty-two Hedgehogs; Foxes, Martens, and Badgers being paid for at the rate of 1s. each. It is probable that many other interesting scraps of information about the Kites might be gleaned from similar parish accounts in other parts of the county.

If we look at the history of the bird in neighbouring counties, we find that about 1825 it was not uncommon in the woodland districts of central Devon, while its nest has been found in that county at a much later date. In Gloucestershire it was not uncommon in some districts about the middle of last century, frequenting the sheep-pastures of the higher Cotswolds, and it lingered on as a nesting species in the Forest of Dean until about 1870. It is probable that the Kite vanished from Somerset as a resident species about the middle of the nineteenth century. I can find scarcely any definite records of the finding of nests and eggs, though old countrymen will sometimes say that the birds were frequently to be seen in their early days, or in the days of their fathers, and some testify to having seen the eggs. A pair, however, were known to nest in the woods overhanging the River Barle, above Tarr Steps, about the year 1850, the late Joseph Jekyll, a former rector of Hawkridge, having often mentioned the fact to his family. This is the only definite record I have come across of the nesting of the Kite in the county of Somerset.

During the last forty years the Kite has only been a casual visitor to Somerset, the examples seen having strayed perhaps from the few remaining haunts in Wales. From time to time a stray specimen has been trapped or shot, and has found its way into some private collection or local museum. The late rector of Brushford, near Dulverton, has informed me in writing that the last Kite he saw in those parts was soaring over his house about the year 1883. In 1888 two Kites were obtained in the county—one caught by a keeper in a trap set for young Kestrels, at Chewton Mendip, and the other shot at Cleeve Wood, near Yatton. These were both set up, and represent, so far as I know, the last Kites obtained in the county.

And so in Somerset, as in the greater part of the British Isles, the Kite is now a bird of the past, though at one time it must have been quite numerous. We know that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the bird was so abundant about London Bridge, that foreigners visiting the city were struck by the fact, and made mention of it in their writings.

GOLDSMITH AS A NATURALIST.

By Bruce F. Cummings.

Oliver Goldsmith might have been a naturalist had the opportunity presented itself. But he would undoubtedly have first been poet and novelist, and Fate allowed him to go thus far but little further. For it was his lot to earn his daily bread by scribbling catchpenny compilations for the booksellers, and in the spare moments to fight for fame by modelling his works of genius. If he had only been granted a few more spare moments, he could have spent them in the woods and fields, and we should find his 'Animated Nature' full of original observation, and in every respect quite a different book.

However, of his few opportunities for studying nature he made the very best; and there is pathos in the fact that, through watching the ways of the spider in the dusty little garret in Green Arbor Court, he was afterwards able to contribute an article on its habits to 'The Bee.' Then one reads of his observing the antics of the Rooks from the Inner Temple; walking in the lanes around the farmhouse on the Edgware Road—another of his lodgings; and, in his happy Irish days, following the gentle art of Izaak Walton, whose pretty writing he since lived to honour with praise. During these short periods of leisure, he saw more, thought more, and admired more than do many in a lifetime. The high position he now holds in the world of letters he owes primarily to his great love of the country and the rural life—depicted in 'The Deserted Village' and 'The Vicar of Wakefield' with the originality and freshness which is Nature's own.

The chief fault in 'Animated Nature' is that it is a compilation. Goldsmith borrows from a large number of authors, including Buffon, Aristotle, Pliny, Linnæus, Pennant, and Swammerdam; however, he would probably have done better if he had quoted fewer authorities, and those more judiciously. The whole eight volumes are interspersed with many very absurd stories about beasts and birds, which his innate simplicity led him half to believe. I will mention a few. Quoting, I believe, Linnæus, he says that a Squirrel, when it wants to cross a river, finds a piece of bark, sets it afloat, and goes aboard; it reaches the other side by using its tail like a fan or windmill! Imagine this timid, unobtrusive creature, with the cunning of a Monkey, watching its anchored "bark" as it waits for a flood-tide or a favourable wind.

We are informed, too, that the Albatross, on flying to an immense height, tucks its head under one wing, and keeps afloat by flapping the other; thus it roosts. "What truth there may be in this statement I will not take upon me to determine" is his comment.

Goldsmith was quite aware of his ignorance of the natural sciences, and he makes no attempt to hide it (for, in spite of his vanity, he was unwilling apparently to assume an affectation of great learning); but, nevertheless, the fear he shows of passing decisive opinions, even on such fables as these, is ridiculous.

A certain few Nightingales are related as being so clever that they could talk like Parrots, and tell each other tales. "Such is the sagacity ascribed to the Nightingale." Would that they had lent a little of this superfluous quality to the credulous author!

These wondrous stories are at all events amusing, and Dr. Johnson prophetically remarked, "He is now writing a Natural History, and he will make it as interesting as a Persian tale." But the extravagant imageries of a Persian tale would not go to form an ideal history of animated nature. The book might have been even more fanciful, for in the preface Goldsmith writes that, before he had read the works of the great French scientist Buffon, it was his intention to treat what he then conceived to be an idle subject "in an idle manner"; for let us "dignify Natural History," he says, "with the grave appellation of an useful science, yet still we must confess that it is the occupation of the idle and speculative rather than of the busy and ambitious."

All is written in Goldsmith's vivacious style, and the first two volumes are to a certain extent excellent in subject matter, for he was able to make use of Buffon as far as the end of the history of quadrupeds. But in justice to Goldsmith, it must be said that he had this help where he least wanted it, as, in dealing with the earth, with man, and with the well-known wild beasts, he had his own engaging descriptive powers, his own knowledge of human nature and anatomy, and a multitude of books, other than Buffon, fairly correct in their accounts of the larger mammals.

Consequently, Goldsmith can, "with some share of confidence," recommend this part to the public, and also I would suggest that his chapters on "Sleep and Hunger," and "Smelling, Feeling, Tasting," are as entertaining as any in the book. In his history of birds and insects he is very meagre and confused, like Pliny. His account of the reptiles is, as one would expect, full of those curious mythical tales, in which Goldsmith revelled more than in scientific facts. In many places throughout this unique Natural History one relishes the numerous personal references which he introduced into most of his writings, and here and there some really fine prose, as fine as any he ever penned.

The naturalist will find amusement in assigning descriptions to their right owners, and in discovering the names of species but vaguely characterized. Then there is humour, which, although unconscious, should not on that account be omitted from among the merits of a book that are deserving of a wider recognition. Of his personal references, I must not pass over his touching remarks on "Hunger," which he wrote perhaps at a time when he felt his own wants becoming more serious day by day:—"In the beginning the desire for food is dreadful indeed, as we know by experience. . . . Those poor wretches, whose every day may be said to be an happy release from famine, are known at last to die in reality of a disorder caused by hunger, but which in common language is often called a broken heart." That death was his own, said Forster in his 'Life.' He (Goldsmith) pities Aldrovandus, the naturalist, whose undeserving end was poverty and death in a public hospital, but how much the more should we lament his untimely decease.

Goldsmith might have lived on his own earnings, but undoubtedly he was extravagant. Yet could not the friendly Reynolds, or the kind-hearted Johnson, have helped him through the mire, or attempted to strengthen those weaknesses, which, in so great and unfortunate a man, we should all be more or less willing to overlook?

Turning again to 'Animated Nature,' let us see what Goldsmith has to say of the pugnacity of the Puffin. As soon as a Raven approaches to carry off its young, the Puffin, making a curious noise like a dumb person trying to speak, catches him under the throat with its beak, and sticks its claws into its breast, which "makes the Raven try to get away." At length both fall into the sea, the Raven of course drowning, to leave the Puffin to return unharmed to its nest.

The Woodpecker feeds sometimes in the following way. It lays its tongue on an ant-hill, and waits until there are a sufficient number of ants collected on it (for they mistake the long tongue for a worm), when the clever bird suddenly withdraws "the worm" and the ants with it, thus reaping a rich harvest!

One can conceive how this curious habit (?) originated, but what the Butcher Bird may be, which is little bigger than a Titmouse and lives in the marshes near London, I cannot determine.

Herons, he tells us, occasionally take their fish on the wing by hovering as the Kingfisher does, but they do this only in the shallows, because in the deeper parts the fish, as soon as they see the Heron's shadow, could sink immediately and swim out of harm's reach. The reader will notice many more such extraordinary pieces of natural history to interest him, and not a few to amuse him.

The Turtle is lachrymose and forlorn, for it sighs and sheds tears when turned over on its back.

The Toad has only to sit at the bottom of a bush and to look a little attractive, when the giddy butterflies "fly down" its throat. A fascinating Toad!

Goldsmith found some difficulty in deciding into what class he should put the Lizards. "They are excluded from the insects," he argues, "by their size, for, though the Newt may be looked upon in this contemptible light, a Crocodile would be a terrible insect indeed." To think they are excluded only by their size!

It is astonishing that a man like Goldsmith should make such an illogical statement as the above. The best that can be said for it is that perhaps it is a sacrifice of sense to effect; this is very unlikely, for he never wrote for effect. Genius, however, is erratic, and Goldsmith, though he "wrote like an angel, talked like poor Poll"; though he was a brilliant poet, he was a bad reasoner.

Johnson, though in general he thoroughly understood Goldsmith's character, and correctly valued his abilities, was hardly right in describing him on the memorial in Westminster Abbey as *physicus*. However, Johnson was quite unable to arrive at an exact estimate in this matter, for natural history was a subject which he understood even less than did Goldsmith, notwithstanding that he knew Woodcocks *must* migrate; and thought he knew that Swallows "conglobulated together" at the bottoms of ponds and rivers in winter time. In the sense that he wrote a Natural History, Goldsmith would perhaps consider himself entitled to be termed a naturalist, though some of us would be glad to earn such a distinction in so easy a manner.

He loved Nature and all God's creatures, but he possessed an "invincible aversion" to caterpillars—which a naturalist would ascribe to his uneducated taste; he abhorred cruelty; and, with an Englishman's prejudice, hated Germany, "which is noted," he writes, "if not for truth, at least for want of invention." It is from this fact, among others, that he considers a German book to show some good marks of veracity!

'Animated Nature' should be more generally read. Superficial and out of date it is, perhaps, to the scientist, yet to the field naturalist it is highly entertaining, and to the student of Goldsmith's character most helpful. All nature lovers must ever remain indebted to Goldsmith for presenting to the people that which had hitherto been hidden in the repulsive garb of consummate learning and scientific names, and thus exciting in the subject interest which is now very widespread.

There are very few who can spare time to study Nature deeply (*miserabile dictu*), and the majority must content themselves "to view her as she offers, without searching into the recesses in which she ultimately hides"; they must "take her as she presents herself, and, storing their minds with effects rather than causes, instead of the embarrassment of systems about which few agree," they must be satisfied "with the history of appearances concerning which all mankind have but one opinion." It is for this class of people that 'Animated Nature' was written.

THE BIRDS OF THE DISTRICT OF STAINES.

By Graham W. Kerr.

(Concluded from p. 310.)

Mallard (*Anas boscas*).—Formerly the only appearances of this bird were confined to small flocks visiting the river in the most severe weather; now, however, large flocks of several hundreds winter on the reservoir, and this spring (1905) several pairs remained to breed on some small ponds near by.

Common Teal (*Querquedula crecca*).—Small parties winter on the reservoir.

Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*).—Some numbers visit the reservoir.

Pochard (*Fuligula ferina*).—During winter I have several times seen a few on the lake at Virginia Water.

Tufted Duck (*F. cristata*).—Occurs only at the reservoir, where they are not so shy as the other Ducks, and do not associate very much with them, preferring the company of the Coots, with whom they swim about; they are often seen feeding and diving quite close to the banks, though I have never seen them leave the water as the Coot does.

Common Scoter (*Œdemia nigra*).—Two birds were shot on the river some years ago just above Bell Weir Lock.

Ring-Dove (*Columba palumbus*).—Very numerous.

Stock-Dove (*C. œnas*).—A few may be met with in Windsor Forest.

Turtle-Dove (*Turtur communis*).—Very common along the Thames Valley.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*).—Plentiful enough where they are preserved. Around Virginia Water and in Windsor Forest the eggs are taken up and hatched out under fowls, so that there are enormous numbers of the birds. During a walk in this part it is no uncommon thing to see three or four albino varieties in a very short space. It is noteworthy that these are always females.

Common Partridge (*Perdix cinerea*).—Well distributed throughout the district.

Red-legged Partridge (*Caccabis rufa*).—Of the rarest occurrence only.

Land-Rail (*Crex pratensis*).—The numbers of this bird vary considerably from year to year. The great June flood of 1903 swept over acres and acres of meadow-land, and destroyed the nests of all ground-breeding birds, besides working havoc among the ditch- and low-bush-breeding Warblers. The Land-Rail was one of the greatest sufferers from this visitation, yet, curiously enough, the following year seemed to bring more than the usual number of the birds.

Spotted Crake (*Porzana maruetta*). — Laleham, 1857 (*vide* Harting's 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 205). I have not met with the bird myself, but there is still much country well suited for it.

Water-Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*).—Rarely seen, but there must be a good many along the river-banks, as men employed in cleaning out the bottoms of osier-beds have frequently brought me the eggs. The latter, besides being larger and of a lighter ground than the Land-Rail's, also seem to be of thinner shell.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*). — Very common along the river-banks. An excellent climber, and I have often seen it moving about in high hedges with great ease. It is adverse to taking to the wing, but can run at great speed. The Moorhen has a great variety of calls, and is frequently heard late in the night. The nest is sometimes placed fifteen or twenty feet from the ground in the crown of some willow-tree, but is more usually among reeds, or on a low branch of some bush just over the water. The eggs are not covered over when the bird is absent from the nest. A large number of weed collections are made quite distinct from the nest, and what object they serve I have not satisfactorily discovered. I call these collections "stands," for I think the bird must use them to rest on, and probably sleep on. Up to the present the Moorhen has not been observed on the reservoir!

Coot (*Fulica atra*).—Very rarely seen on our part of the river, and never known to have bred there; yet during winter many hundreds of them frequent the reservoir, and this spring several pairs remained to breed on a piece of private water near by. I could see the nest from the roadway, and, as I had never taken a Coot's egg, I particularly wanted one for my collection. I set out one night after dark, and soon found the nest. As I waded out the bird left the nest, and swam away, uttering loud cries, vigorously splashing up the water, and continuing to do so for some time. Later in the year a pair nested on Virginia Water lake, which I do not think they have done before. At the reservoir the birds readily leave the water, and wander far over the grassy outer slopes of the embankment.

GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius pluvialis*). — Some twenty-five years ago the Golden Plover was common on Staines Moor, which was then a favourite winter resort for many birds. All this is now changed, and the Golden Plover is only a straggler to the district.

LAPWING (*Vanellus vulgaris*). — A common and increasing species.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago cœlestis*). — In hard weather a fair number appear throughout the district.

JACK-SNIPE (*G. gallinula*). — Mr. Howard Saunders, in his 'Manual of British Birds,' p. 560, refers to a melanism of this bird shot near Staines, and recorded by Mr. F. Bond.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Totanus hypoleucus*). — Large numbers occur on spring and autumn migration. In spring the bird arrives from the middle of April onwards to the end of May, and often not more than a month will elapse before the first of the returning migrants appears.

COMMON CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).—Passes overhead on migration.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*).—The most numerous Gull on the reservoir; they may often be seen in the fields around following the plough.

COMMON GULL (*L. canus*). — A few pass the winter on the reservoir.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER (*Colymbus glacialis*).—In 'The Zoologist' (1902, p. 311) there is an interesting account of one of these birds being caught with a rod and line at Virginia Water in the year 1881. In 1889 another example was shot by Mr. E. Hawes in a flooded field at Egham. It is remarkable that two specimens should have been obtained so far inland within the space of nine years, the more so as the reservoir was then unbuilt.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podicipes cristatus*).—As many as a dozen nests are to be found on Virginia Water lake every year, and one or two more are built on the small Obelisk Pond near at hand. On the reservoir the bird is unusually plentiful, and it is only for about three months (June, July, and August) of the year that it is entirely absent from these waters. I have counted as many as eighty birds in sight at the same time, and that I fancy must be going on for an English record. In spring the male utters a loud trumpeting cry, and when paired the birds often swim up opposite to each other, and remain motionless for some time with their beaks almost touching, as though they were whispering some deep secret to one another. The nest is usually a very substantial structure. The eggs are much pointed at both ends, and usually number three or four, though a clutch of five is not uncommon. When the birds are absent the eggs are covered over with weed. The female alone appears to sit, the male swimming about not far from the nest.

Little Grebe (*P. fluviatilis*). — Not particularly common on our part of the river. More are to be found on various quiet ponds, and these pond-birds breed at a considerably earlier date than those on the main stream. Three broods are reared, and I once found a clutch of five eggs, though, as a rule, I do not think more than four are laid.

NOTES AND QUERIES.

MAMMALIA.

Occurrence of Tursiops tursio, Fabr., on the Sussex Coast.—An apparently adult female of this Dolphin was cast ashore dead between Bognor and Littlehampton, Sussex, about the middle of last month (September). In length from tip of snout to fork of flukes it measured ten feet ten inches. Owing to the advanced stage of decomposition no observations as to the external coloration were possible. The teeth appeared to number twenty-two to twenty-three pairs; they were much worn at apex, and in many cases decayed and even holed through.—H. L. F. Guermonprez (Dalkeith, Bognor).

AVES.

Blackbird Laying Twice in the same Nest.—Referring to previous communications (*ante*, pp. 235, 274, 312), two broods of Blackbirds were some years ago hatched successively in the same nest in an escallonia hedge in my garden here. They doubtless belonged to the same parents, a pair which for a number of seasons utilized the hedge. P. G. Ralfe (Castletown, Isle of Man).

Does the Blackbird Eat Snails?—To this query, so simple at first sight, I should immediately reply in the affirmative; but after carefully reading Mr. A. H. Meiklejohn's note (*ante*, p. 312) I determined to investigate the matter for myself, and not be led, rightly or wrongly, by the many works consulted. That the Thrush does consume great numbers of these tasty morsels I have had ample opportunities of witnessing, but I cannot recall one single instance in which I had seen the Blackbird doing the same; and it was not until the beginning of last month (September) that I succeeded in seeing a Blackbird in the very act of devouring a snail, which was of the striped species (*Helix nemoralis*). It was early morning, and while dressing, I chanced to look out of the window overlooking the small garden at the farmhouse where we were staying; I saw a fine adult male Blackbird on the gravelled path very busy with something on the ground, which looked to me very much like a snail. In order to be quite certain I immediately went downstairs, and, on opening the front door, the bird flew away, leaving on the ground the broken and partly consumed snail. Was this bird driven to depart from its usual fare during this exceptionally hot and dry summer? was a question that immediately occurred to me, for Blackbirds were already attacking the apples which had fallen to the ground (a fruit they rarely touch), and had commenced an attack on the fruit still hanging to such an extent that they had become a pest, and a little powder and shot had to be resorted to in order to thin out their numbers. Determined to continue my investigations, I consulted a few of my many gardening friends—one of them an ardent and most careful observer—but, alas! not one of them could give me a definite reply in regard to the Blackbird, though they were all quite certain that the Thrush ate snails. Summing up the somewhat meagre evidence before me, and taking into consideration the isolated case just submitted, my answer to Mr. Meiklejohn's question must be adjourned *sine die*; but I would like to make the following observations:—(1) that in my humble opinion there is no hard and fast rule in regard to the diet of the Blackbird; (2) that they do eat snails is, and must be generally admitted, though only to a small extent compared to the Thrush; (3) probably they confine themselves more to the smaller species, such as *Helix nemoralis* and *H. hortensis*. I quote the following from Smith's 'Birds of Somersetshire,' p. 68, on the feeding of the Blackbird:—January: seeds, spiders, and chrysalids. February: the same. March: worms, buds of trees, and grubs. April: insects, worms, and grubs. May: cockchafers and worms. June: worms, grubs, and fruit. July: all sorts of insects, worms, and fruit. August: the same. September: the same. October: worms, chrysalids, and grubs of butterflies. November: seeds, corn, and chrysalids. December: the same. (The author quotes the above from a paper which appeared in 'The Zoologist' for the year 1863 (p. 8760) on the "Food of Small Birds.") It will be seen that this formidable menu does not contain the snail, though Mr. Cecil Smith goes on to say that during the dry summer of 1868 both Blackbirds and Thrushes have been most busily employed in devouring snails, which bears out my contention, but the inclusion of buds of trees in the above list I think is an error.—P. F. Bunyard (57, Kidderminster Road, Croydon, Surrey).

Variety of Common Wren (Troglodytes parvulus).—On June 13th of this year, when wandering along a green lane near Elstree, in Hertfordshire, I met with a cream-coloured variety of the Common Wren.

It was sitting with its brothers and sisters, all of the normal colour, on an old Thrush's nest in a large overgrown hedge. Wishing to examine it more closely, and thinking that it had only recently left the nest, I pursued it, but unfortunately it escaped owing to the thickness of the hedge. Although I never met with it again, I saw it then sufficiently clearly to observe that it was of a uniform cream-colour all over. This I believe to be an uncommon occurrence in the Wren, and should be glad to know if any other instances have been recorded. In the same hedge, on May 12th, I saw a nest of the Goldcrest (*Regulus cristatus*) in some ivy about eight feet above the ground, which I believe is an uncommon nesting-site for this species. Last year I came across an unusual instance of perseverance exhibited by the Common Wren. A nest of that species was found in a gorse-bush in Battle, which on April 27th contained two eggs; these were removed. The nest was next examined on the 29th, when it again contained two eggs; these were also taken, but in spite of this there were another couple of eggs in the nest on May 1st. This rather does away with the theory that a Wren always resents the slightest interference with its nest.—H. Whistler (Battle, Sussex).

Late Stay of Swift.—When sitting on the lawn close to the sea at Chapel St. Leonards, I saw a Swift on Sept. 15th. The bird was hawking about, and came within ten yards of me several times. After a lot of wind on the 21st the scrub on the back of sea-bank was full of migrants. On the 22nd I was sitting on the top of the bank, and heard a new bird note. I saw a smallish dark bird sitting on a dead twig about six yards away, and got my glasses on it at once; it was a female Rustic Bunting. I could see every feather, and had it under observation for quite half a minute, when it flew southward over the sand-hills. I also saw a female Pied Flycatcher, and hundreds of commoner migrants, evidently a big lot working south. — J. Whitaker (Rainworth Lodge, Notts).

Iÿnx torquilla in Cheshire.—A Wryneck was caught in a street-lamp on the borders of Winsford at 7 a.m. on Sept. 9th. This is an interesting observation, as from a reference to Coward and Oldham's 'Cheshire Birds,' this is the sixth recorded instance in this county.—Joel Southworth (92, Wharton Road, Winsford, Cheshire).

Hoopoe in Cheshire.—A male specimen of the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) was taken near Chester on August 29th last. According to Dr. Dobie's list of the Birds of Cheshire and North Wales, this is the third specimen recorded for this district. The first specimen was taken at Chester on Sept. 11th, 1792; the second specimen at Coed Coch, North Wales. Circa twenty-six years. — A. Newstead (Grosveno Museum, Chester).

The Hobby in Cheshire.—A fine adult male Hobby-Hawk (*Falc subbuteo*) was taken at Tarvin, near Chester, early in August of this year, and has recently been presented to the Chester Museum.—A Newstead (Grosvenor Museum, Chester).

Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus).—A young male was shot on Twin Island, Belfast Lough, on Sept. 9th, and is now in the hands of Messrs. Sheals, the well-known taxidermists here, where I had the pleasure of examining it. The bird had been seen haunting the place before it met with the usual welcome that is generally accorded a rare visitor to our shores. This constitutes the second record for Belfast, as, according to Thompson, one was shot in the bog-meadows on Sept. 30th, 1819. It is interesting to note that both these birds occurred in September, as, on referring to Ussher, whose 'Birds of Ireland' now supersedes the former work, he states out of twenty-two or more records of the capture of this bird in Ireland, and where dates have been given, one occurred in September, ten in October and November, and one in January.—W. C. Wright (Belfast).

Supposed Flamingo near Aldeburgh, Suffolk.—While lately on a cruise in the steamship 'Oithona' (from Marine Biol. Laboratory, Lowestoft) fish-marking, &c., besides other grounds, that of Hollesley Bay was trawled northwards to beyond Orfordness, and anchor was cast for the night abreast of Aldeburgh. Going ashore, through the kindness of a local resident, Mr. Ganz, I had an interesting conversation with Mr. Charles Clarke, naturalist and birdstuffer, 1, Brudnell Terrace. Among other things, he informed me of a Flamingo frequenting the neighbourhood. I there and then wrote at his dictation the subjoined statement of the case:—"Mr. and Mrs. Perry, visitors at the Brudnell Hotel, were coming up the River Alde to-day (Wednesday, Aug. 22nd), in company with William Brinkley, wildfowler and fisherman of Orford, when they saw standing on the mud a strange bird, taller than a Heron, and apparently quite white, but which on nearer approach seemed to have salmon-pink wing-coverts and dark or blackish primaries. The bird rose from the mud, and flew close over their boat. Then on its flight it showed a long and slim body, and outstretched neck and legs. In fact, it resembled a great white cross from underneath. It flew off towards Orfordness." Mr. Clarke is decidedly of opinion that it was a Flamingo. His and Brinkley's practical knowledge of the shore birds of the district guarantees their recognizing a stranger. Their description of its coloration, &c., supports the idea of its being an immature Flamingo (*Phœnicopterus roseus*, Pallas). On Aug. 23rd the 'Oithona' returned to Orford Haven, entered the Alde, and worked up and down the river to as far as Aldeburgh, leaving on the 25th, but without seeing or hearing more of the bird in question. In Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iv. (1885), edited by Howard Saunders, and in the latter's 'Manual' (1899), reference is made to four instances of Flamingoes, *viz.* Sheppey, August, 1873 (a doubtful escape); Staffordshire, September, 1881; Hampshire, November, 1883; and South Kent, August, 1884. I am unaware whether others have since been recorded. Although this presumed Suffolk example has not been unmistakably identified, it may still be deemed worthy of notice, to be taken for what it is worth, the possibility being that more may be heard of the straggler.—J. Murie (Leigh-on-Sea, Essex).

P.S.—A report ('Aldeburgh, Leiston, and Saxmundham Times') states that the Flamingo seen on the Alde river was also noticed later on the Woodbridge river.

Red-crested Pochard at Yarmouth. — On September 4th thirteen Ducks were observed to come in from seaward, and alight on the north-west side of Breydon. An amateur puntsman named Youngs, who was lurking under the "walls" hard by, immediately sculled after them, and got a charge of B.B.'s into their midst with telling effect. Nine were killed or maimed, and, although the birds had on arrival appeared tired and remarkably tame, the wounded ones, by diving and the use of their wings, gave him an arduous half-hour in retrieving them by doubling after them, and the use of his shoulder-gun. One bird, spoiled by decapitation for a "specimen," was eaten by Mr. Youngs; the other eight he sold to Mr. Saunders, the taxidermist, of this town. A tenth wounded bird managed to reach the marshes, and was lost, but was soon after picked out of a ditch by a marshman, who ended its career in the oven. I called on Mr. Saunders on the 5th, and saw four birds still in the flesh, four having already been made into skins. They were unmistakably Red-crested Pochards (*Fuligula ferina*). They were, of course, by no means so distinguished in appearance as birds shot in nuptial dress; the plumage, to my mind, greatly resembled that of an adult female Smew; and, indeed, the general contour of the birds was slim and rakish, like that dainty little creature. The white shoulder-patches, and that of the lesser wing-coverts, secondaries, and primaries, were very conspicuous. The toes of six of the birds were Naples-yellow, with a suggestion of redness, the webs being blackish; these were males. The other two had greenish yellow-tinted toes. I suggested these were females, and this proved to be so on dissection. The cap was reddish brown, and the beak scarlet-lake. We had a look at the windpipe, and were much struck with its peculiarities of conformation. I made a rough water-colour sketch of the best bird, and obtained three large parasites, which, under the microscope, look hairy and forbidding, with the suggestion of much tenacity of purpose. Had I been earlier, Mr. Saunders remarked, I could have had more, and been welcome to them, for they made things lively for him for a time. According to the 'Field' of Sept. 15th, two birds of this species were shot on the 8th on Hickling Broad by Alfred Nudd, keeper to Mr. S. H. Smith, a duck being secured, but the drake was not recovered until two days later, and was consequently spoiled. In all probability these belonged to the same flock. Mr. J. H. Gurney, in suggesting the likelihood of the heat-wave having brought them hither, remarked that at any rate "the poor things met with a *warm* reception when they came." The prevailing winds had for some time previous been southerly.—ARTHUR H. PATTERSON (Ibis House, Great Yarmouth).

Hybrid Black-game.—Referring to Rev. F. C. Jourdain's list of Black-game-Pheasant hybrids (No. 27), will you allow me to say that the bird in Mr. Le Strange's collection was shot at Snettisham about the year 1850, as stated in the 'Birds of Norfolk,' vol. i. p. 375, and not in 1876? It was given to Mr. Le Strange by the widow of Capt. Campbell, who had the Snettisham shooting about the year 1850, and is the only known Norfolk hybrid between these two species. I mention this as the great disparity of dates (1850 and 1876) might lead to the impression that two distinct individuals were referred to. It is difficult to say when the indigenous race of Black-game became extinct in this country, but probably one of the last was a Greyhen, seen by the writer, which was killed in 1852 near Lynn. Mr. Le Strange tells me that the last he saw in Norfolk was about the year 1872 or 1873, when shooting with the late Mr. Anthony Hamond at Leziate, or Bawsey, near Lynn; but many unsuccessful attempts to reintroduce this fine bird into Norfolk have been made of late years.—THOS. SOUTHWELL (Norwich).

Baillon's Crake (Porzana bailloni) near Stockport. — An adult male Baillon's Crake was captured alive in the neighbourhood of Stockport, Cheshire, in May, 1905. The bird subsequently came into the possession of Dr. Charles Cairnie, of Manchester, who showed it to Mr. Charles Oldham and me. The actual locality where it was obtained is uncertain; it was captured in a drain by a workman, and passed through two other hands before Dr. Cairnie obtained it. Stockport, though a Cheshire town, is on the Lancashire-Cheshire border, and it may have been caught in either county. The outer web of the first primary is white, and in all particulars its plumage agrees with the description of the species in Dresser's 'Birds of Europe,' and with specimens in the Dresser Collection in the Victoria University Museum, Manchester. Dresser, however, says (*op. cit.* vol. vii. p. 276) that the legs are "dirty greyish flesh," though Seebohm and Sharpe describe them as olive. Dr. Cairnie, who saw the bird in the flesh, is certain that they were green, and gave his taxidermist instructions to be careful in this particular. Probably some descriptions and plates, for Dresser is not the only one who describes them as other than greenish, are taken from dried skins in which the colour has faded.—T. A. Coward (Bowdon, Cheshire).

Notes on the Dabchick (Podicipes fluviatilis). — Mr. Oldham's notes on the Little Grebe (*ante*, pp. 351–353) appear to throw some doubt on several of my observations regarding this bird. I do not think that three eggs is an unusual clutch. I have frequently found nests with three highly incubated eggs; and on Sept. 8th this year I saw three young birds just hatched on the nest, and this must surely be sufficient proof that three eggs *do* sometimes constitute a clutch. I have had several Dabchicks alive, and have never seen them walk on their feet in the way Mr. Oldham describes, but, on the contrary, shuffled along on the belly, and rested with the whole tarsi on the ground. The captive Dabchick I mentioned in my paper was one which was confined on a tank of clear water, and its every movement could be closely observed when submerged, and, as before stated, I frequently saw it use its wings.—Gordon Dalgliesh (Brook, Witley, Surrey).

PISCES.

Loch Broom Sea Monster. — Regarding the Loch Broom sea monster and correspondence thereon (*ante*, pp. 355–357), I may say by the way that it is refreshing in absence of the sea serpent and mermaid tone. The evidence given is simply hasty impressions of the observer, and, *ceteris paribus*, comparable with my note on Flamingo—a passing record and not indisputable data. I strongly support Mr. Southwell's conclusion of the likelihood of the Loch Broom animal being a Basking Shark (*Selache maxima*). His reasoning is sound, and very rightly he attaches importance to the habits shown; *i. e.*, its demeanour under the circumstances, as less likely to be deceptive than supposed shade of colour, length of body, or height and shape of fins. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that some twenty years ago, or over, there was a profitable Basking Shark fishery off the north-west coast of Ireland, which, however, dwindled away as the price of liver oil declined. It is said the Sharks approached the Irish coast from the Atlantic in spring, by midsummer and in autumn sheering off by way of the North of Ireland, passing round Scotland to the Norwegian area. This would tally with an occasional odd and big one appearing in the neighbourhood of the Minch, *ergo* the Loch Broom specimen. I may refer you to the latest account of the facts of the case in Green and Holt's "Cruise of the 'Harlequin'" in 'Report to Council, Royal Dublin Society,' 1892, pp. 39 and 301.—J. Murie (Leigh-on-Sea, Essex).

Quite a number of communications have reached me, to which I have replied privately, including sketches of the back fins, &c., of the animals, and including two accounts of the Loch Broom appearance. I have not, however, seen the account sent to the daily papers, as Mr. Workman had (he does not quote the reference). The first communication about the animal seen at Loch Broom, between the Priest Island and Glasleag Beg (not *Glostloch* Beg as printed), was from Mr. Mackenzie Catton, with a drawing, done from memory. The next in reply to inquiry was from Mr. Henderson, Ullapool,—Mr. Workman's correspondent—with a drawing, in all respects similar to that supplied by you to Mr. Southwell (*ante*, p. 356), and labelled "Basking Shark" by Mr. Henderson. I replied to that, that I was inclined to agree with Mr. Henderson in his identification; but I did not quite appreciate the pointed appearance given to the larger fin. I then had a letter and a drawing of a "sea monster" from Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford, which was much truer to the outline of the *truncated* back fin of the Basking Shark, as viewed by her from the deck of her yacht (*in litt.* Sept. 9th, 1906); and she distinctly says, "the stick-like upper part and sudden widening, and that it was not the usual pointed fin." I recognized this as belonging to the Basking Shark, and wrote to Her Grace to that effect. Then followed a journal of Mr. J. Pedder's sojourn in the West in July, August, and September, 1906, with report of similar appearance, and a sketch taken on the spot; *i. e.* from the deck of the yacht he was on board of. Mr. Pedder *is an artist* (and, you may be aware, illustrated the ninth volume of our Faunal Series ('A Vert-Fauna of North-west Highlands and Skye,' 1904). Shortly afterwards Mr. Pedder paid me a visit (Sept. 14th–15th, 1906), and I told him his sketch and description clearly authenticated the fact that it was the dorsal fin and tail-fin of Basking Shark which he had seen; and we satisfied ourselves by comparing it with the illustration in Lydekker's 'Royal Natural History' of that fish. In his journal, Mr. Pedder says:—"On July 28th we weighed anchor, touched at Kyleahin again for letters and some supplies, and then set sail for Torridon; wind light and variable. In the Sound of Raasay, two or three *Whales were blowing* about half a mile away from us towards the entrance of Loch Broom. One of them must have been a huge creature, for, after watching a great length of his back rise and disappear, and upon which was a very big fin, we came to the conclusion that the fin stood up from the back at least six feet. Someone aboard a steamer making for the Kyle, possibly much nearer to the beast, fired a shot from a gun at it; but the great fin kept coming up at intervals as before until we were out of sight—about 2.30 p.m., between Crowlin Islands, Longay, and Scalpay." I consider Lydekker's illustration settles the question of identity as belonging to a Basking Shark.—J. A. Harvie-Brown.

Thresher Shark (Alopecias vulpes).—A specimen of this singular fish, now being preserved for the Norwich Castle Museum, was taken in the nets off Hasborough, on the Norfolk coast, on the 26th September last, and brought into Cromer. It measured 10 ft. 8 in. total length. This Shark has been met with on the Norfolk and Suffolk coast several times, generally about the commencement of the Herring season. The earliest mention of the species is, I believe, by Dr. Cains, who described a specimen stranded near Lowestoft in February, 1570. A second is recorded by Mr. Gunn as having been captured on July 4th, 1867; this measured 14 ft. 5 in. in all, 7 ft. 4 in. of which consisted of the whip-like upper lobe of the caudal fin. Others were taken off Lowestoft on Sept. 28th, 1879, and on Oct. 22nd, 1881, in the same locality; the latter measured 12 ft. 10 in., 6 ft. 4 in. of which consisted of the tail. In the Hasborough specimen the curious notch at the base of the caudal fin, which is not shown in Mr. Day's figure, was very conspicuous.—Thomas Southwell (Norwich).

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NOTICES OF NEW BOOKS.

The Journal of the South African Ornithologists' Union. Pretoria.
Annals of the Natal Government Museum. Part I. Adlard & Son, London.

The South African region, as now understood by zoologists, was, in the days of our adolescence, principally described in the narratives of geographical and natural history explorers, among whom we may mention the names of Burchell, Livingstone, and Holub. Then came a period of gold-hunting, and the records of the Stock Exchange constituted the most popular gazetteer. For a time it was the world-watched scene of military operations. Even so recently as a decade since we left South African shores, there was, apart from Cape Town, little scientific enterprize, and the South African Philosophical Society may be said to have held the field. Since then the advance has been phenomenal, especially in a country where the race for wealth has almost become an ideal aim. Recently both the South African and Grahamstown Museums have published their Annals, and the Natal Museum has now followed their example.

An active and growing Natural History Club exists in the once "golden city" of Johannesburg, and, what is still more noteworthy, there is now a "South African Ornithologists' Union," well established, ably directed, and enthusiastically supported. Of the latter, we now possess vol. i., and part 1 of vol. ii.; of the Durban publication, the first part has recently reached our hands. Both these publications have come to stay, and are well worth the attention of all naturalists. Not only do they foster and promote the study of zoology in our South African colonies, but they afford a means of publication of very much valuable information which our central societies would clearly be unable to supply.

The presidency of the South African Ornithologists' Union was originally held by Mr. W. L. Sclater, who has now left South

Africa, and his place has been taken by a whilom contributor to 'The Zoologist'—Mr. J. A. S. Bucknill, author of the 'Birds of Surrey.' The 'Annals of the Natal Government Museum' are edited by its Director, Mr. Ernest Warren.

The South African ornithologists are giving much attention to the nests and eggs of South African birds, and the 'Journal' of the Union contains some excellent photographs of the first, and some chromo-plates of the latter, the eggs being in the first instance drawn by Mr. Gronvold. There is a wide field for work in this direction, and the results will supplement Stark and Sclater's 'Birds of South Africa,' volumes which have also only appeared during the last ten years.

The Durban publication opens with descriptions of new fishes from the coast of Natal, by Mr. C. Tate Regan, and Pisces alone would almost occupy naturalists at this port. Marine Mollusca, a kindred subject, occupies the pen of Mr. Edgar A. Smith, whilst the Director writes on Rotifers, Hydroids, &c.

May some other outlying posts of the British Empire soon follow this excellent example.

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